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GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY INC.

# The Gull

Golden Gate Audubon Society Newsletter
Volume 76 • No. 11 December 1994

## Mono Lake: Victory at Last

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In a historic decision that caps fifteen years of litigation by the Mono Lake Committee, National Audubon Society, California Trout, and others, the State Water Resources Control Board voted unanimously on September 28 to modify the City of Los Angeles' rights to divert water from Mono Lake. After almost fifty years of unrestricted diversions, the City's Department of Water and Power (DWP) must now allow the lake to rise over seventeen feet and conduct restoration of damaged streams and wetlands.

The Water Board adopted a plan for managing the lake, on average, at 6,392 feet above sea level, slightly higher than the minimum level advocated by the Mono Lake Committee. The Board estimates it will take twenty years for the lake to rise to that level. Diversions will then be limited to roughly one third of historical amounts.

In an equally historic -- and far less expected -- move, DWP Commission President Dennis Tito promised that the water agency would not appeal the decision. Tito and DWP General Manager William MCarley joined the Mono Lake Committee (MLC) and other parties at a press conference to make the announcement. "The time has come to accept the state's judgment and move on, to work constructively to establish reliable supplies to replace the water that is being dedicated to preserve the Mono Basin environment," said Tito. "We can now look ahead toward ... the restoration of the streams and environment in the Mono Basin." Los Angeles Councilwoman Ruth Galanter, representing the City of Los Angeles at the press conference, termed DWP's new spirit of cooperation a sign "of genuine change in the Department." The no-appeal assurance was worked out only days before the Water Board vote. MLC Executive Director Martha Davis met with Tito and McCarley in Los Angeles for a discussion of their concerns and emerged with the promise of a new era of cooperation between DWP and the MLC.

The agreement marks a significant change in the Department's approach to Mono Lake. Bill Hasencamp, manager of Mono Basin studies for DWP, expressed some disappointment at the decision but looked to the future. "I think the time for arguing is through," he told Mono County *Review Herald*. ":The best way to move on is to work together with groups to find out what's best for the Mono Basin and what's best for Los Angeles."

The 216-page Water Board decision summarizes 43 days of evidentiary testimony by expert witnesses and is accompanied by a final Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The testimony and EIR served as the basis for the Water Board's findings.

The Board assessed evidence on issues such as air quality, riparian vegetation, California Gull habitat, fisheries,

Christmas Bird Counts
Oakland: December 18
San Francisco: December 28

**Mono Lake** *(cont.)*
waterfowl, aquatic productivity, and visual resources.

The decision also designates Mono Lake as an Outstanding National Resource Water. This designation, created by the Clean Water Act, recognizes the "exceptional ecological significance" of Mono Lake and provides strict assurance that the lake's "beneficial uses," such as aquatic productivity, are protected. The Water Board action follows the July endorsement of the designation by the Lahontan regional Water Quality Control Board , chaired by Mono County Supervisor Tim Alpers. Prior to the evidentiary hearings, the Water Board received over 4,000 letters from members of the public and heard three days of public testimony. "While the evidentiary hearings dealt with scientific and legal issues, the public had a tremendous influence on the Water Board as well," comments MLC Eastern Sierra Representative Sally Miller. "A great diversity and number of individuals expressed their love for Mono Lake in their written comments and oral testimony. They touched the hearts of Board members."

Just days before the Water Board released news of their proposed decisions, Governor Pete Wilson signed into law AB 3096 (authored by Assemblyman Richard Katz, D-Sylmar), which appropriated $9 million per year over four years for the construction of water reclamation facilities in Los Angeles. The bill appropriated the money authorized by AB 444 in 1989.

The federal government has also supported the creation of alternative, environmentally-sound water supplies for Los Angeles by allocating funding for the development of water reclamation facilities. Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Daniel Beard addressed the Water Board before their vote. "I am here today to reaffirm the Federal government's role," he said,"... at a minimum these projects will develop over 135,000 acre-feet of replacement water supplies for the Los Angeles region." Average historic diversions from the Mono Basin were below 100,000 acre-feet.

Beard observed that, during the debate over federal funding, all sides realized that environmental mistakes had been made in the construction of water supply systems. "Not surprisingly, some have been reluctant to confront these mistakes," he concluded. "We almost lost Mono Lake because of that reluctance."

Eldon Vestal, a retired Fish and Game biologist who worked in the Mono Basin from 1939 to 1950, also addressed the Water Board before its vote. Vestal had testified during the Water Board hearings, producing dusty boxes of fifty-year-old field notes which provided valuable information about the prediversion conditions of Mono Basin streams.
After urging the Board to adopt the draft resolution before them, Vestal reflected on the destruction he saw beginning in his youth and the unlikely protection the lake was about to receive. "I've been waiting more than fifty years for this moment," he told the Water Board just before their vote. "The City of Los Angeles was a tremendous political power over the years and challenging them seemed like grabbing for a bite out of the moon."

**Whither the Mono Lake Committee?**

Because water alone is not enough to heal the lake, the [Water] Board ordered substantial restoration programs to go forward. So on paper, Mono Lake now looks better than it has for years. But the rising lake and restoration work won't take care of themselves. Healing the damage done by years of water diversions will be complicated, largely because the Water Board left important details to the future.

For example, the Water Board did not specify the scope or details of a stream and wetland restoration plan, although they ordered DWP to produce one. It did not specify how water above and beyond the "fish flows" will be delivered to the lake. And it ordered DWP to draft the specifics of a still-nebulous Grant Reservoir Operations Plan.

Restoring the lake, streams, and wetlands to even a semblance of their former health will take a great amount of work. The Mono Lake Committee is committed to seeing that work accomplished.

The Water Board wants interested parties to provide input on the restoration and operations plans. The Mono Lake Committee will be there throughout the process to represent the lake, streams, and wetlands as these plans are constructed.... The Committee's presence is crucial for maintaining the momentum public agencies have achieved toward protecting and restoring Mono Lake.

*Reprinted from* Mono Lake Newsletter, *Special Issue 1994*

**Recommended Reading**

If news of the victorious culmination of the fight for Mono Lake has you itching for other tales of battle waged against the water interests, by all means hasten to read *The River Stops Here* by Ted Simon (Random House, 1994), the riveting story of Richard Wilson's fight to stop the damming of the Eel River and the inundation of Round Valley in Mendocino County. In 1968, the environment was just beginning to become a political issue; there had been fights for parkland and for the redwoods, but this was the first time that anyone had taken on the powerful California "water machine" and the Army Corps of Engineers. It's a story of California politics and a social and economic history all rolled up into one, and a good follow-up to *Cadillac Desert*.

*Ann Dewart*

## GIFTS AND BEQUESTS

**For The Bird Box** Stefanie Arthur
Ruth Doty
George Finger
Debra Love Shearwater

**For GGAS** Philip and Marjorie Bush
Evelyn Gaines
Mary Anne Rotella
James and Joyce Schnobrich

The Society welcomes gifts in general or gifts in honor of or in memory of relatives and friends. Such gifts will be used as specified by the donor, or if unspecified, at the discretion of GGAS Board of Directors. This includes their use for general GGAS activities or for special programs of the Society including Audubon Canyon Ranch of which GGAS is a sponsor. Please send your gift in the form of a check made out to Golden Gate Audubon Society, 2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G, Berkeley, CA 94702. All gifts are tax deductible. The Society is also appreciative of any bequests. Such bequests should specify as recipient the Golden Gate Audubon Society, Inc. All gifts, donations and bequests will be acknowledged in The Gull as well as personally on behalf of the Society by the Secretary.

# News from around the Bay

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

'Tis the season ... for Christmas Bird Counts, that is. In both Oakland and San Francisco, we're well along in planning for our annual CBCs.

The Oakland Count is on Sunday, December 18. Extending from Point Isabel in the north to south of the Oakland Airport and from the Bay to Lafayette Reservoir, the Oakland count circle encompasses a variety of habitats that always produce a good number of species. Bird for the day with a group or be a feeder watcher in the comfort of your own home.

The San Francisco Count is on Wednesday, December 28. The circle covers the northern San Francisco Peninsula from San Bruno to the Golden Gate. Join a team in one of the areas for a full day of birding; help for a few hours by covering your neighborhood park or square; be a midday birder for a few hours in downtown San Francisco, or watch in your backyard for as little as 30 minutes. As always, the boat situation is uncertain, so if you can help with a boat please contact Alan Hopkins.

Both counts would welcome more participants, so if you're interested, but haven't yet signed up, contact the appropriate compiler(s) soon. Folks who let us know *early* are *very much appreciated* by the compilers! Neither count will be able to place counters at the last minute; cut-off for San Francisco is December 23. If you have sent in a form, but haven't received an assignment yet, you can expect to hear from us soon. We look forward to seeing you in the field.

**Oakland Compilers:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Kay Loughman | (510) 841-7428 |
| Janet Wessel | (510) 939-2499 |

**San Francisco Compilers:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Dan Murphy | (415) 564-0074 |
| Alan Hopkins | (415) 664-0983 |

## AUDUBON CANYON RANCH

It's the holiday season and we at ACR wish you all the best during this very special season. Take a winter hike, join a Christmas Bird Count, and make a New Year's resolution to take an active part in Audubon Canyon Ranch during 1995.

We are pleased to let you know our new officers and directors took office at the October Board of Directors' meeting. With a board of 40 members, that's a considerable accomplishment. Steve Thal is our new president and Katie Beacock is our new first vice-president. Thanks so much to outgoing president Bob Hahn for two years of very hard work. The job must be a lot harder than I thought. The very youthful Gary Holloway, ACR president from 1990 to 92, just retired and is planning a frenzy of world travel.

It may not be too late to sign up for the January 7 Bouverie Preserve guided nature walk. Our February walk is scheduled for the 18th, to be followed by one on March 4. Reservations can be made by calling the preserve at (707) 938-4554.

Perhaps your New Year's resolution is to become a more active citizen of the natural world. Our coastal prairie restoration day at Cypress Grove Preserve on January 14 is a perfect opportunity. If you really want to jump in with both feet, become a Ranch Guide. Training sessions are planned for Saturdays from February 4 through March 11. There is a $10 fee, so these 6 sesions only cost $1.67 each. Give the Ranch a call at (415) 868-9244.

*Dan Murphy*

### SEED AVAILABLE

Forget to order? Birds hungrier than you anticipated? We've got lots of seed and feeders in stock at the GGAS office. Call us at (510) 843-2222 and stop by to pick it up.

## SAFARI 1995

Golden Gate Audubon Society is pleased to announce that our second trip to Kenya will take place from August 4 to 21, 1995. Kenya's Francis Kitayi and Alan Hopkins from GGAS look forward to leading a repeat of this past summer's great safari.

In August, twelve GGAS members flew to Kenya for a 17-day trip of a lifetime. Participants reveled in a host of mammals, including lion, leopard, cheetah, elephant, giraffe, hippopotamus, and the now-rare Black Rhinoceros. The birdwatching was equally impressive: over 300 species were recorded, including Ostrich, Marabou Stork, Malachite Kingfisher, four species of bee-eater, and twelve species of sunbird. After each day's wildlife watching, participants enjoyed the deluxe accommodations and service provided by Kenya's safari lodges.

Travel arrangements will again be made by Park East Tours and the projected cost is $4,395 which includes round-trip air-fare from San Francisco and a $200 donation to Golden Gate Audubon. For information on the next safari to Kenya, call Alan at (415) 664-0983, or the GGAS office at (510) 843-2222.

*Alan Hopkins*

# Observations: October 6 - November 2

Daniel Singer

### PELAGIC SPECIES

In general, pelagic birds seem to be scarce in Monterey Bay this fall and relatively abundant around the Cordell Bank. Flesh-footed Shearwater continues to be well-reported belying the fact that this is one of our rarer (though regular) seabirds. Most Monterey Bay pelagic trips this fall have had at least one, with four reported from the 10/22 trip (DLSh) and eight-to-ten observed on a Cordell Bank trip 10/8 (RS, DLSh). Ashy Storm-Petrel has been notably absent from Monterey Bay with only scattered individuals reported.

### WATER BIRDS, HAWKS

Waterfowl reports are on the rise, another reminder that winter is on the way (in case you were wondering). Three Tundra Swans flew over Point Reyes, MRN, on 10/29 (KH). A Snow Goose lingered at Miller Knox Regional Shoreline, CC, from 10/18-26 (SGl). Three "Cackling" Canada Geese were at Zmudowski State Beach, MTY, on 10/22 (DSg, DR, RC). A female **Garganey** put in a brief appearance at the Spaletta Ranch on 10/8 (SNGH fide KB) and was rediscovered later in the day at the Drakes Beach pond (KB). An exceptional rarity anywhere in North America other than the western Aleutians, there are still less than twenty records of this species in California. Eurasian Wigeon reports include one or two from Charleston Slough, SCL, through 10/22 (m.ob.), up to three at the mouth of Pine Gulch Creek, MRN, through 10/19 (CTL, KH) and singles at Pescadero on 10/15 (BMcK) and Redwood Shores Sewage Ponds, SM, on 11/1 (RSTh) and Crab Cove, ALA, on 10/26 (SWl). Up to two Tufted Ducks were at Alviso, SCL, from 10/15-22 (m.ob.). Four Harlequin Duck reports include two at the Richmond Marina, CC, on 10/21 (SGl). An Oldsquaw present through 10/26 at the end of Marina Way in Richmond, CC, has evidently summered at this spot (KGH, SGl). Pacifica again has good numbers of Black Scoter with twenty-five seen from the municipal pier on 10/15, and at least fifty there on 10/29 (DSg).

Five Broad-winged Hawks were observed at Hill 129 in the Marin Headlands on 10/6 (GGe) and another was seen over outer Point Reyes on 10/7 (RS). A single fly-over Sandhill Crane in Palo Alto, SCL, on 10/11 (SCR) was followed by eighteen flying over Alviso on 10/16 (PJM).

### SHOREBIRDS, ALCIDS

Two or three American Golden-Plovers were reported from the Spaletta Plateau at Point Reyes between 10/16 and 10/22 (JM) and up to fourteen Pacific Golden-Plovers were there 10/7-22 (m.ob.). A **Little Stint** at the Bolinas Sewage Ponds 10/10-11 (TEa, KH, RS) is presumed to be the same individual photographed there on 9/22, but the dramatic appearance differences and time-lapse between sightings does make me wonder.

Twenty-five South Polar Skuas were seen on the 10/8 Cordell Bank trip (RS, DLSh). A **Thick-billed Murre** was in Monterey Bay on 10/5 (DLSh, JLD), where over 90% of all accepted records of this species in California have occurred. Another was reportedly seen flying south with a small flock of Common Murres off Southeast Farallon Island, SF, on 11/1 (fide KH). An Ancient Murrelet was reported from the Hayward Shoreline, ALA, on 10/18 (RJR).

### DOVES TO VIREOS

White-winged Doves were seen at the Fish Docks, Point Reyes, on 10/7 (RS) and Southeast Farallon Island 10/16 (fide KH). One or two **Barred Owls** were heard calling in the Pine Creek Basin of the South Warner Wilderness Area, MOD, on 10/23 (JTr). Stay tuned for one coming to your neighborhood soon. There were two apparent Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers at Ed Levin County Park, SCL, on 10/27 with one still present through 11/2 (SCR, SBT). Another Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was found along Mt. Hamilton Road near Joseph Grant County Park, east of San Jose, on 10/30 (MMR fide SCR). It wasn't all that long ago when reports of this species before December were almost unknown. A Red-naped Sapsucker near Pescadero, SM, since 9/22 was still present through 10/27 (BMck).

Least Flycatcher was reported from Princeton, SM, on 10/6-7 (SBT, DKe) and Spaletta Ranch, Point Reyes, 10/30-31 (JSL, KB). The first Eastern Phoebes of the fall include one at Briones Reservoir, CC, on 10/16 (RSa) and another at Southeast Farallon Island on 10/21 (fide KH). Five or six additional Tropical Kingbirds were reported along the coast from San Mateo to Mendocino counties between 10/6 and 11/2 (m.ob.). A **Sedge Wren** was reportedly in a closed area of the Hayward Regional Shoreline 10/16-17 (RAR). There are currently only four records of this very rare bird in California. At least two and possibly three Townsend's Solitaires were found at Point Reyes during October with one at the Lighthouse on 10/7 (RS), another or possibly the same individual at the Fish Docks on 10/8 (AdW), and a third at the Lighthouse on 10/29 (JSC). A **Gray-cheeked Thrush** played hide-and-seek at the Lighthouse, Point Reyes, on 10/26 (RS).

Sage Thrasher reports include one at the Lighthouse, Point Reyes, on 10/8 (AdW), another at the Marin Headlands hawk lookout (fide CLF), and a third at Southeast Farallon Island (fide KH). The last two sightings occurred during the latter half of the month, but dates were not provided.

Red-throated Pipits were found at Point Reyes on 10/9 (RS) and near Table Rock, SCZ, on 10/23 (DLSu). A **Northern Shrike** was seen in coastal San Mateo County on 10/22 (RSTh). An alder thicket along Hwy. 1 near Marshall, MRN, contained a **Philadelphia Vireo** on 10/5 (RS). There are still less than twenty records of **Yellow-green Vireo** in Northern California making two reports this month exciting news. Both were in San Francisco County with one reported

from Fort Funston on 10/8 (DPH) and another from Southeast Farallon Island on 10/17 (fide KH). All California records of this species have occurred during September or October.

### WARBLERS

Vagrant warbler reports typically drop off in October and this year is no exception. Only one additional report each of Tennessee and Chestnut-sided warbler following strong showings last month is a good indication of the migratory timing of these species. Six more Magnolia Warbler reports include birds at the Fish Docks, Point Reyes, and Bodega Bay, SON, which may have lingered over several days (m.ob.). Average numbers of Black-throated Blue Warblers continued passing through our region with seven observed at various coastal locations between 10/5 and 10/30 (m.ob.). One at Mendoza Ranch, Point Reyes, on 10/28-29 (CTL, KH) was likely banded at Southeast Farallon Island on 10/24 (fide KH). A Black-throated Green Warbler spent several days at a residence in Los Gatos, SCL, 10/20-24 (fide SCR, SCR, BRe). A Blackburnian Warbler was at the Fish Docks, Point Reyes, from 10/14-19 (CTL, m.ob.) and the Blackburnian Warbler along Pescadero Creek in Pescadero, SM, lingered till 10/5 as did the Yellow-throated Warbler (both BMcK). Single Prairie Warblers were seen at Ano Nuevo, SM, on 10/8 (RSTh), and at Bodega Bay, SON, on 10/9 (RoM). Enough Palm Warbler reports came in (up to 43 individuals between 10/5 and 10/30) to suggest this species is occurring in our region in moderate numbers this fall, but far below last year's amazing total of almost 900. A Bay-breasted Warbler at Southeast Farallon Island during the last week of the month is the second report of this species this season (fide KH), and an average number for most falls recently. Of six Blackpoll reports, five were from the San Mateo coast between 10/5 and 10/25 (RSTh, AME, DPo) with the sixth from Bodega Bay on 10/5 (DN). Two of three Black-and-white Warblers spanning 10/5 to 10/25 (RSTh), and five of six American Redstarts spanning 10/5 to 10/9 (RSTh, BMcK, DSg) were from coastal San Mateo. The Prothonotary Warbler at Princeton, SM, continued through 10/7 (DKe) and three Northern Waterthrushes were discovered in Santa Clara County between 10/22 and 10/25 (SCR, MJM).

### SPARROWS, LONGSPURS

Two American Tree Sparrows were at Southeast Farallon Island from 10/4 to 10/5 (PP fide KH) and one was seen at Road Forks Pool, Point Reyes, on 10/11 (KH) and 10/26 (RS). Twelve reports of Clay-colored Sparrow between 10/5 and 10/29 were mostly coastal except for one at Coyote Hills, ALA, and another at Point Richmond, CC (m.ob.). Fifteen Swamp Sparrow reports between 10/14 and 10/29 include nine from a stretch of the Guadaloupe River in San Jose on 10/25 (SCR). White-throated Sparrow was well reported from coastal counties (m.ob.) marking its return to our region as a fall transient and winter visitor. The single Harris' Sparrow reported was from the Farallones on 10/21 (fide KH). A McCown's Longspur spent several days at the MCI (RCA) Station, Point Reyes, 10/23-26, before its identity was confirmed (CCo, MiF,KH). Very few records exist for this species along our coast. Lapland Longspur is scarce this fall judging by the four reports received, totaling five individuals. Of eight Chestnut-collared Longspurs observed, one was at the summit of Sierra Road east of San Jose, SCL, on 11/1 where several spent last winter (SCR). Marin's second Rusty Blackbird sighting this month was at the Spaletta Ranch at Point Reyes between 10/19 and 11/1 (KH, m.ob.). Evidently the bird showed little regard for those who labored long and hard to find it.

The monthly observation column is generated from reports made to the Northern California Bird Box. Some sightings are unconfirmed and numbers of birds are often best regarded as estimates or "best guesses". In general, birds in boldface are very rare in our region, geographically or seasonally. Many of these are currently reviewed by the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC). Observers are encouraged to provide written and/or photographic documentation to the CBRC, c/o Michael Patten, P.O. Box 51959, Riverside, CA 92517-2959, for any species currently on the review list. A list of review species can also be obtained from the CBRC secretary at the address above.

**Observers:** Richard Ackley, Florence G. Bennett, Jim Booker, Ken Burton, Rita Carratello, Chris Corben, J. Scott Cox, Gary Deghi, Jack Dineen, Ruth Doty, Jon L. Dunn, Todd Easterla, Al Elmer, Gil Ewing, Michael L. Ezekial, Carter Faust, George Finger, Mary Foster, Gene Gerlach, Steve Glover, Kevin Guset, Keith Hansen, Hugh Harvey, Dave Haupt, Mike Healy, Mike Hetherton, Donna Heim, Stephen N. G. Howell, Joan M. Humphrey, Dan Keller, Cindy Lee, Calvin Lou, John S. Luther, Michael J. Mammoser, Roger Marlowe, Mac McCormick, Bert McKee, Peter J. Metropulos, Joe Morlan, Dan Murphy, Dan Nelson, David Powell, Peter Pyle, Mark Rauzon, Bob Rerling, Jean M. Richmond, Robert J. Richmond, Don Robertson, Mike M. Rogers, Steve C. Rottenborn, Ruth Rudesill, Dean Sandee, Barry Sauppe, Rusty Scall, Doug Shaw, Debra Shearwater, Dan Singer, Rich Stallcup, David L. Suddjian, Scott B. Terrill, Ronald S. Thorn, Dorothy Tobkin, John Trochet, Susan Wallace, Weishaupt, Jerry R. White, David Wimpfheimer, Adam Winer.

Data thanks to Joe Morlan and the Northern California Bird Box

**Abbreviations for counties:** ALA, Alameda; CC, Contra Costa;MOD, Modoc; MON, Mono; MRN, Marin; MTY, Monterey; SCL, Santa Clara; SCZ, Santa Cruz; SF, San Francisco; SJ, San Joaquin; SM, San Mateo; SON, Sonoma

## PAPAGENO PROJECT

The Papageno Project seeks to place birdfeeders and provide seed for hospices and individuals who are housebound and/or bedridden. GGAS supports the project by providing seed and feeders at cost.

We suffered a setback when GGAS stopped bird seed sales temporarily. Buying inferior seed and paying full price for it was galling. Fortunately, the owner of Petpourri pet stores in San Francisco made a generous donation, but I'm relieved to be able to obtain seed from the Audubon Society again.

I hope the membership will continue this project by making a small donation. Bird seed costs money. I volunteer my time to make deliveries to many hospices (weekly trips to Laguna Honda) and to individuals. Their gratitude more than repays me.

I could also use some help, specifically with outreach, to bring more birdfeeders and seed to those who are confined to bed and house. (You write and take response calls; I'll do the running!) Potential volunteers can call me, Gwen Thoele, at (415) 824-1923.

If you can help with a tax-deductible donation, you may add it to your bird seed order or send directly to GGAS.

*Gwen Thoele*

# Back Yard Birder

*Meg Pauletich*

My grandson, Ryan, loves finding feathers in our yard. August and September are good months to hunt for feathers, especially the bright blue ones from both Scrub and Stellar's jays.

Feathers are unique to birds. They allow them to fly, they are a bird's adornment, and they also insulate and protect birds from the elements. Therefore, a great deal of time and energy is spent keeping feathers in peak condition: preening, bathing, dusting, oiling, sunning, scratching, and anting. When not feeding or sleeping, a bird will probably be tending to its feathers. Although they are extremely strong, tough, and resilient, feathers gradually become worn. As a bird takes off and lands, wing and tail feathers wear away from contact with the ground, coarse grasses, or tree branches. They become worn from going in and out of a nest cavity or from flying between shrubs and trees while feeding. In addition, various parasites browse among the feathers. Naturally, this damaged plumage must be regularly replaced, a process called molting.

Feathers themselves are essentially dead so shedding is caused by a new feather pushing out the old one. There are many variations of the molt, depending on the species of bird. The order in which feathers are lost is part of a bird's genetic heritage. During the first year of life, birds molt most frequently. Adults generally molt annually, but there are many exceptions. E.g., some eagles and cranes molt wing feathers one at a time over a 2-year period so that they can always fly.

Since molting requires a great deal of energy, it generally occurs before migration while food is still plentiful and the demands of the breeding season are over. A large number of migratory birds whose feathers are subject to heavy wear undergo a partial molt **before** breeding. If a complete feather is lost before molting, a new one takes its place. Feathers are lost symmetrically from both sides of the body enabling the bird to continue to function. Because they are crucial to flight, wing and tail feathers are lost only 1 or 2 at a time. From start to finish, molting takes varying lengths of time with 49 to 62 days being the average.

There are always exceptions. For example, a large group of aquatic birds lose all their flight feathers about the same time (loons, grebes, anhingas, flamingos, ducks, geese, swans, most cranes and rails, and many members of the auk family). For up to 3 or 4 weeks, ducks are flightless. Swans remain grounded up to 7 weeks! During this defenseless time, it stands to reason that they are very quiet, hiding from predators among thick vegetation.

Another group of birds changes plumage to coincide with the seasons as a means of camouflage. Ptarmigans and Snow Buntings "wear" white plumage in winter which becomes mixed in spring and then brown in summer.

The process of molting is not completely understood. It seems that a bird's endocrine system stimulates new feathers to grow. Influenced by the amount of daylight and other environmental factors, the sexual glands control the molt overall.

From our standpoint, it is much easier to simply change our attire as befits the climatic conditions. But feathers serve birds well as an all-season, all-purpose covering.

# Bird Box Feedback

To the Editor:

I am a regular caller to the Bird Box. After listening through certain reports to it recently, I feel compelled to write.

I thought the Bird Box was a forum for reporting rare birds in the Bay Area. I did not think it was a forum for lecturing listeners. I did not think of it as an appropriate place to leave a dissertation on a species, recommend further reading (even listing page numbers!), argue with a previous caller over bird identification, or identify the previous caller with whom you have a disagreement.

So just press 3 on your touchtone phone, you may be saying. The danger in this is that I might actually miss a bird the lecturer has buried at the end of his lecture.

I don't know the solution to this. I think Joe Morlan has refined the Bird Box considerably since it first started. He has made many improvements and it is quite logical and easy to use. The only thing missing is the Joe-filter from the old days, back when all the callers to the RBA had to pass muster before their birds made the final cut.

C. Lieurance

Enclosed find [check] for the bird box and/or weekly update. Like many others, I hated the change, particularly when I couldn't get through for hours. But you've worked out some of the chinks - the weekly update is great, and I'm happy to add a little $ to help keep it going.

Stefanie Arthur

Attached is a check ... to help with the cost of upgrading the Bird Box. It's in partial thanks for a Little Curlew (a life bird), and a great morning birding. Also very belated thanks to Joe Morlan for 20 years of rare bird alerts, without which I would not have been at the right place even half the time!

Robert A. Lewis

**Note:** There have been a couple of glitches in the Bird Box due to computer problems. Fortunately the system operator was around and the situation was quickly righted. His eternal presence, however, cannot be assured and he thinks the problem may be that we are pushing the limits of our old 286 computer. If anyone is upgrading and has a spare 386 with 4 MB RAM and an ISA bus, please consider donating it to the birds and their watchers.

# Field Trips Calendar

**Saturday and Sunday, December 3-4**
**Gray Lodge and Sacramento Wildlife Refuges**

For this two-day trip, meet on Saturday at 9 a.m. in parking lot #14 at Gray Lodge. Drive east on I-80 15 miles beyond Davis to Route 99 exit. Go north 52 miles on Route 99 to the town of Gridley. Turn left (west) on Colusa Hwy. and continue five miles to Pennington Rd. Turn left and follow signs to Gray Lodge Wildlife Refuge. Proceed through the checking station (entrance fee), and continue to parking lot #14.

We will caravan through the Gray Lodge Wildlife Refuge on Saturday, and through the Sacramento Wildlife Refuge on Sunday.

On Sunday, we will meet at 9 a.m. in the visitors' parking lot at the Sacramento Wildlife Refuge. From I-5 take the Norman Rd. exit (just north of the Glenn Co. line), and follow signs to the refuge.

Allow two and one-half hours driving time from the Bay Area. (AAA map of Sacramento Valley Region is helpful.) For accommodations, the Blue Gum Willows Motel off I-5 at Willows (916) 934-5401 is suggested (there is no lodge at Gray Lodge), and camping is possible at the State Park in Colusa. Bring lunch, scopes, and clothes appropriate for the valley in December (chilly). Heavy rain cancels trip. Leaders: Steve and Rene Margolin (415) 954-1623. $ (*)

**Saturday, December 3**
**Monterey Bay and Coastal Areas**

Meet at 9 a.m. in Monterey at the foot of Coast Guard Pier. (Bring quarters for parking.) We will bird this area, then drive north, stopping at various spots, including Moss Landing. We will be looking for loons, grebes, gulls, alcids, and rocky coastline species. Beginners welcome. Bring lunch and a scope if you have one. Leader: Don Starks (408) 266-2969 (eve.). (*)

**Saturday, December 10**
**Coyote Hills Regional Park**

Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Visitors' Center for a half-day trip. (You might choose to make it a full day outing by spending the afternoon, on your own, at nearby S.F. Bay Wildlife Refuge.)

From East Bay, take I-880 south to Rte. 84/Dumbarton Bridge exit. Go west and take Ardenwood/Newark Blvd. exit. Continue on Ardenwood Blvd. three-quarters of a mile to Commerce Dr. and follow signs to Coyote Hills. From San Francisco, take Hwy. 101 south beyond Redwood City, cross the Dumbarton Bridge and exit on Paseo Padre Pkwy.; go north one mile to Patterson Ranch Rd. and follow signs to Coyote Hills. We will be looking for Virginia Rails and Soras, and expect to see a variety of waterfowl, Black-shouldered Kites and perhaps a Loggerhead Shrike. Leader: Rusty Scalf (510) 523-7108. $ (*)

**Sunday, December 11**
**Arrowhead Marsh/San Leandro Creek**

Meet at 9 a.m. for this half-day trip. Take Hwy. 880 to the Hegenberger Rd. exit. Drive west about one-half mile toward the Oakland Airport. Pass Leet Dr., and meet in the small parking lot just beyond the creek. We will be looking for waterfowl and shorebirds. Beginners welcome. Rain cancels. Leader: Jeffrey Black (510) 625-7068. (*)

**Wednesday, December 14**
**Mini-trip to Lake Merritt, Oakland**

Meet at the Rotary Science Center at 9:30 a.m. Go east on Grand Ave., cross Harrison St., and turn right on Bellevue Ave. to Lake Merritt. Continue to the Rotary Science Center, on the right, just beyond the duck pond. This is a good opportunity to review waterfowl. Lunch optional. Rain cancels trip. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510) 351-9301 and Jean-Marie Spoelman.

**Sunday, December 18**
**Oakland Christmas Count**
*(see page 91)*

**Wednesday, December 28**
**San Francisco Christmas Count**
*(see page 91)*

**Wednesday, January 11**
**Mini-trip to Arrowhead Marsh, Oakland**

Meet at 9:30 a.m. at the marsh. Take Hwy. 880 (Nimitz) to the Hegenberger Rd. exit. Drive west to Doolittle Drive and turn right. Go a short distance and turn right again onto Swan Way. Turn left after about a block and follow the signs to the marsh (Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline). Park in the second parking lot on the left. We will look for Burrowing Owls, shorebirds, and waterfowl. Rain cancels trip. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510) 351-9301 and Jean-Marie Spoelman

**PLAN AHEAD:**

**Saturday, January 14**
**Palo Alto Baylands.**
**Leader: Dan Murphy**

For details on this trip, see January issue of *The Gull*.

**Trips marked with $** go to parks and other sites that require an entrance fee.

**Carpooling** arrangements will be attempted for trips marked (*).

**Problems:** if you need a ride or can take a passenger, or if you need information and have difficulty reaching a field trip leader, call Russ Wilson, Field Trips Committee Chair, at (510) 524-2399.

## DEBUNKING THE MYTH

A few months ago we wrote an article, "What's Going On?" in which we described the wise-use movement's challenge to good government and sound environmental regulation. One of the movement's most effective tools is its assertion that all issues come down to "jobs versus birds" (or whatever environmental issue is at stake). In other words, environmental regulation is responsible for many of the economic ills of our country.

In our article, we cited a study by Professor Stephen Meyer of M.I.T. that clearly showed that strong environmental regulation has no effect on the economic health of states that have such regulations.

Now comes information that such strong regulations may even prove to be of economic benefit. Recently, Fred Cannon, Senior Vice-president of the Bank of America, reported that following the regulatory protection of the Spotted Owl in Oregon and other parts of the north-west, Oregon has had one of the strongest economies in the nation. Apparently the maintenance of a high quality of life, i.e., preservation of natural resources, has made that state very attractive to new jobs. In that vein, Oregon now has a lottery, the proceeds of which go to watershed restoration, watersheds that in many cases were significantly injured by the logging industry.

It is heartening to know that facts are coming in that refute the argument that it is "jobs versus the environment." It is disheartening to see that this good news does not get nearly the same play, if it gets any play at all, in the media.

*Arthur Feinstein*

## VALERIE DACOSTA

***Ed. note:*** *although we're proud of our long history, we tend to have a short memory when it comes to the accomplishments of our past members. It's not an intentional slight, but as new faces naturally take the place of old, it's sometimes difficult to maintain the thread of continuity. We received the following letter from Robert DaCosta, who reminds us of one of GGAS's stars thirty years ago.*

My wife Valerie died at a Mill Valley nursing home on October 28.

She established her reputation as an expert birder in the eastern United States, beginning in the 1940s. She moved to San Francisco in 1961, and shortly joined the Board of Directors of GGAS, first as Membership Chair and then Field Trips Chair. She organized numerous land and sea trips, attracting birders from all over the U.S. and Europe; some of her trips out of Monterey required up to four boats. The trips became so well known that both the New York *Times* and *Time* magazine sent correspondents to cover them and published articles and photos. The New York *Times* used it as a feature in their Sunday issue.

She also did volunteer work for the Marine Mammal Center and P.R.B.O. [Point Reyes Bird Observatory]. At the time of her death, she was still on the P.R.B.O. Advisory Board.

Recently the Friends of the Sea Otter set up a scholarship fund in her name for the purpose of encouraging teachers and students interested in ecology and the environment to pursue studies in this area. Val was a member of numerous organizations in the conservation field.

*Robert DaCosta*

**WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

As a member of National Audubon Society, you are automatically enrolled in the local chapter, Golden Gate Audubon Society. Chapter benefits include receipt of *The Gull*, access to field trips and programs, and the opportunity to volunteer. Call the office if you have any questions.

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**Northern California Bird Box**
**(510) 524-5592**
**Weekly Rare Bird Summary**
**(415) 738-1499**

5 species of loon have been seen in California


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**Golden Gate Audubon Society**
**2530 San Pablo Avenue**
**Suite G**
**Berkeley, California 94702**
**Phone: (510) 843-2222**
**Fax: (510) 843-5351**

Office Hours:
Tues.- Fri. 9-12, 1-4